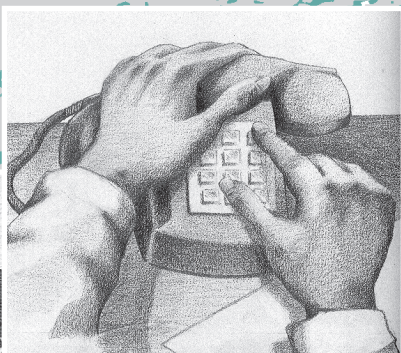




A Practical Guide to the SIDS Home Visit



CALIFORNIA
SIDS
PROGRAM
SUDDEN INFANT
DEATH SYNDROME

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT
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Sudden Infant
Death Syndrome

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Forward

This poem, "Could You Please Just Listen?" was written by a SIDS parent, Deborah R. Gemmill in response to the question so many well meaning people asked after her son Tyler died from SIDS. They asked, "How can I help?" Deborah's response was simply, "Could you please just listen?"

My baby has died. Please don't tell me you know how I feel. You don't. You can't. I hope you never do. Don't tell me that he's with God and I should be happy. How can I be happy when every time I go into his nursery all I see is an empty crib and toys that will never be played with? How can I be happy when my arms ache to hold him?

Please don't tell me God needed another angel. It's hard for me to understand God would take away this little one who was so loved. Maybe I'll understand later. But for right now...let God find another angel. Please, please, please don't tell me I'll have other children. Maybe I will...but my son was not a puppy that ran away...he cannot be replaced.

Maybe you could just listen when I remember out loud all the things we did together...the walk, the early morning feedings, the first time he rolled over. Maybe you could just sit with me while I cry over all the things we'll never do together.

Please don't tell me it could be worse. How?

I really don't want to hear about your grandfather's death. It's not the same. Don't think my pain will be eased by comparison. Of course I'm glad that he didn't suffer, but I'd be a lot happier if he hadn't died at all.

I know it must be hard for you, but would you mind looking at his picture just one more time, we don't have many of him and I'm just a little bit afraid that I may forget what he looked like. He wasn't here that long you know.

Could you please just listen?

Don't tell me I'll get over it. There is no "over it," only through it. Please don't tell me I should be glad he was just a baby, or that at least I didn't get to know him. I knew him before I ever saw him. He is a part of me. And now he is gone. I haven't just lost a seven-month old baby. I have lost a part of myself.

I know you mean well, but please don't expect me to tell you how to help me. I'd tell you if I knew, but right now I can hardly put one foot in front of the other. Maybe if you looked around, you could find some things to do, like taking my daughter for a walk, or doing the dishes, or making some coffee. Please don't try to remove my pain or distract me from it. I have to feel this way now.

Maybe you could just listen.



Introduction

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is a medical and psychological crisis. The sudden and unexpected nature of SIDS is a crisis for which no one can truly prepare. It is an event that will never be forgotten, which brings great sorrow, and that will change the parents' lives forever. The public health nurses and/or health professionals who provide the early intervention, support, counseling and comfort to the family after the baby's death play a vital role in assisting them through the SIDS experience.

The SIDS community has long recognized the importance of providing early and continuous support and comfort for newly bereaved parents. Those who have experienced a SIDS death know all too well that once first responders have provided their professional services they quickly disperse, often leaving families without the support they require to survive. Because of that, members of the SIDS community have worked long and hard for legislation that requires and funds the SIDS home visit. For many families the home visit is the cornerstone of their support.

The public health professionals* making the home visit are in a unique position to address the family's needs. The health professional can help alleviate guilt, pain and suffering by providing information in a sensitive manner, explaining autopsy results, providing community resources, and offering guidance for surviving children. Parents consistently report on the benefits associated with the SIDS home visit.

However, SIDS leaves an emotional impact on everyone touched by it, including the health professionals that provide care and support for the family. The purpose of this guide is to assist public health professionals in preparation for their role in the SIDS home visit. It will provide information about the essential skills that are required for the effective support to families, identify ways the professional may be personally affected, and provide suggestions on how to personally cope with the emotional impact of SIDS.

* *Section 462 of the Health and Safety Code defines the designated agent of the local health officer as a trained public health professional who is a public health nurse or a social worker. For the purposes of this training manual, the term public health nurse is synonymous with "trained public health professional."*

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